

# Annual Report 2007



compos  mentis  
WORKING TOWARD WELLNESS, INC.

# compos mentis

WORKING TOWARD WELLNESS, INC.

**Compos Mentis at Cayuga  
Nature Center**

1420 Taughannock Blvd.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[composmentisithaca.org](http://composmentisithaca.org)

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## Mission

Compos Mentis helps young adults learn to live with a mental illness, and ease the transition back to school or work by working with others, caring for living things, and sharing their experiences.

### Executive Summary

When we announced the start of Compos Mentis a year ago, no one imagined that the farm's first season could be as successful as it turned out. If we had had two or three apprentices and a handful of volunteers, at least that would have been a start. Instead, we attracted seven apprentices and about 35 volunteers, some of whom went through profound changes in the process of transforming a fallow farm into a productive one. We grew more than 50 different fruits, vegetables and herbs, collected 500 dozen eggs from our laying hens, engaged in a variety of afternoon activities, casual conversations and structured discussions, and invited family and community members to biweekly dinners. Apprentices learned to prepare and preserve the food they grew, build with wood and wire, design and paint a mural, bind journals, make soap, and more. They practiced meditation and Pilates. Three of them accomplished educational goals. And all of them expressed satisfaction with the program, although it was not an ideal fit for two of them. In its first year, the growth of the program was robust, and this has created new opportunities.

In its first six months, Compos Mentis influenced attitudes toward mental illness in Tompkins and nearby counties. The program affected approximately 45 apprentices, family members, partners, and close friends, and some 35 volunteers. Many of the 200 or so local mental health professionals took note of the program and some became involved. Staff and board members discussed Compos Mentis with 100 area residents in service organizations and clubs, and another 150 student visited the farm and/or volunteered. Compos Mentis received excellent news coverage in the Ithaca Journal and on the radio, and several thousand more people were introduced to the idea of a transitional therapeutic workplace.

We are deeply grateful to all the people who are making this possible—the individuals, families, businesses, organizations, and foundations supporting Compos Mentis. With generous support we were able to provide full tuition for three apprentices in 2007, and we would like to offer full or partial scholarships to more in 2008. Now that we have a hoophouse in which to work, and now that we know just how much work there is to be done, our program coordinator will begin work in April instead of May. The board is discussing other steps, too, that would take us in the direction of becoming a year-round program. They include cooperating with other not-for-profit organizations.

### Evaluation

Our seven apprentices came with a range of diagnoses, abilities, and interests. Their illnesses included histories or symptoms of depression, anxiety, panic, compulsive thinking, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, attention deficit, mood and eating disorders. All of them experienced social isolation as a result of illness. Compos Mentis was for them a place to go and a way to structure their time. They came to be with people who are experiencing similar things. Three had left college in crisis. Three had been hospitalized recently. Some liked farming; others warmed to it.

Staff, volunteers, and families witnessed significant progress in many of the apprentices. One became much more open and affectionate with family members, another managed to travel alone, a third commented on feeling much happier. Three apprentices achieved educational goals: one started college full-time in the fall, one began taking courses again, and a third completed a two-week intensive workshop that had been tried twice but failed due to illness. All of the apprentices engaged in casual conversations and formal discussions about mental health and wellness, and each of them benefited from the program. However, one apprentice was too ill to feel like a member of the group and another had physical limitations that were restrictive in a farm-based program.

For some, progress was subtle. An apprentice who hopes to return to school and is also practicing emotional self-care tested the balance by doing some school work with a Compos Mentis volunteer. An apprentice who chose to leave the program eventually settled down to do serious work with mental health care professionals. And an apprentice whom it was later discovered was not cooperating with a psychiatrist tried to appreciate the beauty of the farm and its natural setting despite constant feelings of grief and shame.

We conducted two written exit surveys. Some apprentices found our structured discussions helpful to their self-understanding, others preferred the casual conversations that happened in the field or while preparing and eating luncheon meals. There was consensus that taking care of living things (plants, animals and people) was very helpful in focusing on things other than themselves; and they are more accepting of the fact that they are living with a mental illness. Some but not all reported that Compos Mentis was a big help in developing realistic goals for the next steps in their lives. There was agreement, too, that being with others in a safe and supportive environment was important,

that they enjoyed being outdoors, but that family members still did not understand them very well.

## Lessons from Year One

The first year of our new venture taught us important lessons:

- Starting a farm is harder than working one: We underestimated the amount of work it would take to transform a half-acre field of grass into a prolific vegetable garden, with an adjacent perennial garden. By season's end we had donated 500 pounds of food to local pantries—and we did this after feeding ourselves, preparing dishes for biweekly Family Nights and a Harvest Dinner, sending volunteers home with produce, and storing food for winter pot lucks. In 2008 we will not have to start the garden from scratch. But we want to make other improvements to the farm, and not underestimate the work they will require.
- We need a second staff person in our second season: Our full-time program coordinator, Shannon Haskins, did an extraordinary job—with apprentices and their families, therapists, and case managers, and with volunteers, and visitors—while managing the day-to-day operation of the farm at the same time. In 2008 we plan to hire an assistant to the program coordinator, anticipating that several more apprentices will join the program.
- In terms of volunteers, we did not know what we needed: Not until we observed the way volunteers worked with apprentices did we understand what we could ask of them. Some were excellent; others walked a fine line between being a volunteer and an apprentice. In 2008 we will invite a number of our best volunteers from 2007 to become volunteer staff. Other volunteers and visitors will be encouraged to come and work at Compos Mentis on a designated day of the week, likely to be Fridays.
- Community members gave more than we guessed: The hoop house where we grew seedlings, our chickens and rabbits, seeds and transplants, farm tool collection, refrigerator and stove, lawn mowers, paints, and the shingled roof and concrete floor of our three-sided living room—are among the larger items that were donated to Compos Mentis by people intrigued by the program. The yurt, too, where we sit and discuss, meditate, and do Pilates is on long-term loan from the fellow who crafted it by hand.
- An apprentice without a therapist is like a tomato plant without a stake: Apprentices who were able to draw support from family, friends, and therapists made

more obvious progress than those who had some but not all of these. In 2008 we are likely to require, or to encourage in strongest possible terms, that apprentices work with a therapist, in addition to a psychiatrist, while at Compos Mentis. Also, we will try to engage family members more intensively.

- If you build it, they will come—but not until they know about it: Despite months of recruitment before Opening Day, it took a season's worth of newspaper and radio coverage, reprints of our brochures, updates to our Website, colorful posters, Open Houses, visits to service clubs, and our Raucous Auction fundraiser before Compos Mentis was widely recognized. In 2008, we will not have to start our publicity effort from scratch.

## Goals and Challenges

Our clearest challenge in the next few years is to grow in the right directions, at the right pace. We began as a seasonal program for lack of year-round quarters. This was fortunate, for it allowed us to start on a small scale. However, to be more effective as a place where people can come to terms with mental illness and ease their transitions back to school or work, we need to be available to them when they need us, at any time of the year. This would require new facilities and a more diversified work program.

Becoming a year-round program would require a capital campaign extending over several years. The board is seriously considering this. The scope of the campaign has not been determined, but it is anticipated that cooperation with other not-for-profit organizations would be an important component.

In the immediate term, we enter the 2008 season eager to hire an assistant program coordinator, work more closely with volunteer staff, involve the families of apprentices in meaningful ways, improve the farmstead, and continue to welcome apprentices who request financial aid. We have a good idea, from apprentices' evaluations and staff and volunteers' observations, where the strengths of our program are, and the weaknesses. We will address these in this second season.

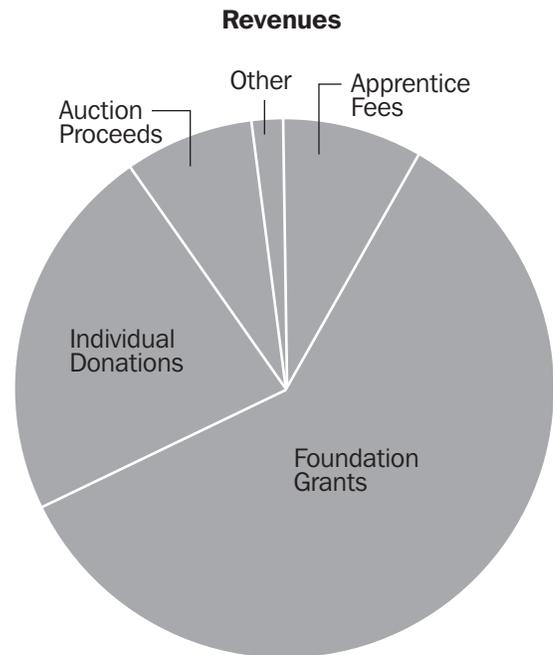
Board members, staff, and volunteers are enthusiastic to carry on the work of Compos Mentis. The program got off to a strong start in 2007—indicating that a therapeutic place where people diagnosed with mental illness can come to work both on the farm and on their own recovery might be a valuable adjunct to currently available mental health care.

## Financials

Compos Mentis operates on a calendar-year basis. The information below is actual through December 31, 2007.

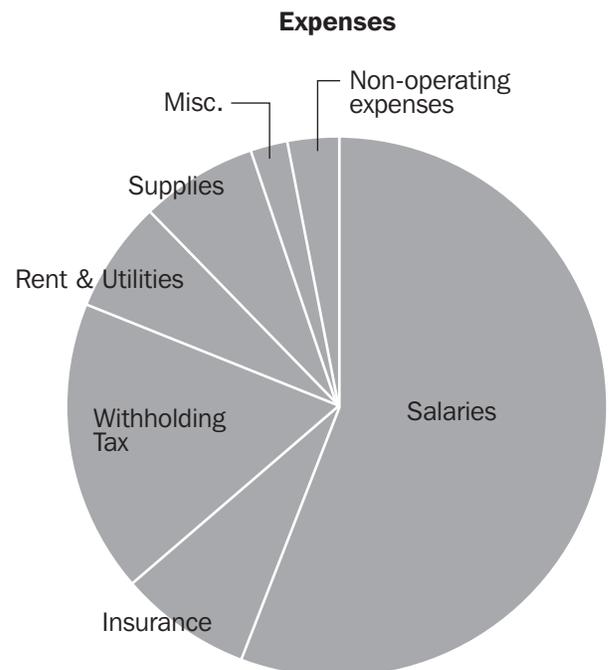
### REVENUES

Apprentice fees	\$11,900
Foundation grants	\$80,500
Individual Donations	\$30,855
Auction proceeds	\$11,190
Miscellaneous	\$2,462
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$136,907</b>



### EXPENSES

Salaries	\$50,925
Insurance	\$7,357
Withholding taxes	\$15,699
Rent & Utilities	\$6,215
Supplies	\$6,510
Miscellaneous	\$2,076
Non-operating expenses	\$2,638
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$91,422</b>



**NET INCOME** **\$45,485**

## Donor List

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#### **Selected Donors of In-Kind Items**

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Wegman's  
Pete Wetherbee  
Wickes Lumber  
Metta Winter

## Media Coverage

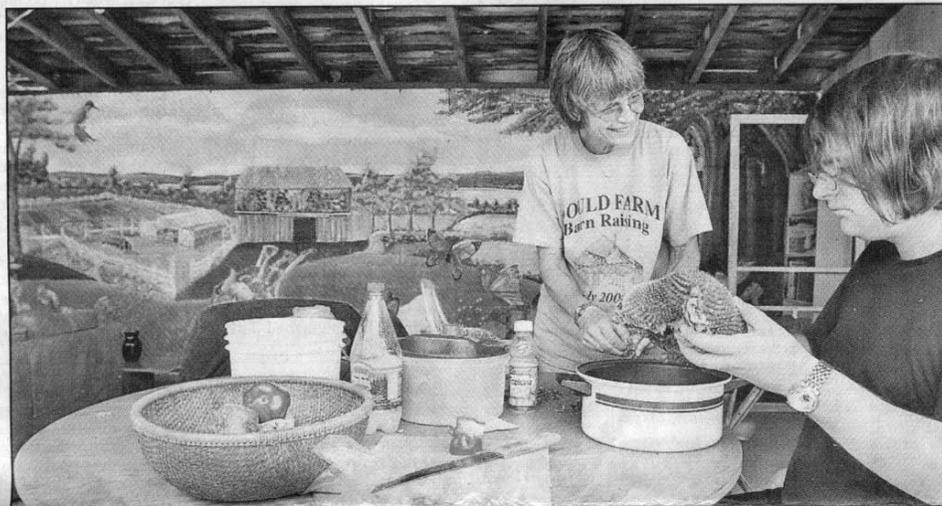
### Radio

- September 5, 2007, **Cayuga Radio** broadcast  
Interview with Kevin Mooney
- Dec. 21, 2006, **WEOS at 89.7 & 90.3 in Geneva, NY & 88.1 in Ithaca, NY**, broadcast  
Interview of Executive Director Carole Stone and Board Chair Abby Eller on “Out of Bounds,” hosted by Tish Pearlman.

### Print

- October 9, 2007, **Ithaca Journal**

## MEMORIES OF SUMMER ON A SPECIAL FARM



ERIC STEWART / Journal Staff

Susan Larkin, left, and David Larkin, volunteers at Compos Mentis, pick sunflower seeds in front of the newly painted mural, background, at the Compos Mentis farmhouse Wednesday afternoon in Ulysses.

## Mural will be a reminder at Compos Mentis

By **Tim Ashmore**  
tashmore@ithacajournal.com  
Journal Staff

**TRUMANSBURG** — Tucked away off Route 89 in Trumansburg sits Compos Mentis — a budding nonprofit that helps adults with mental illnesses regain control of their minds and lives.

Luella Barlow, a 26-year-old native of Scotland, recently finished painting a 300 square-foot mural on the back wall of what volunteers and apprentices call “the bistro.”

Since the organization bought the land, the three-walled, cinder-block building that is the bistro has undergone what coordinator Shannon Haskins calls a transformation that was “incredible to see.”

The mural displays the farm that those attending Compos Mentis worked and harvested through the spring and summer.

Barlow is quick to mention that she wasn't alone in the painting. She said every apprentice and volunteer had a hand in the painting.

“It was a way for people to relax and have fun and do something creative,” Barlow said. “I wanted to create an environment where people (could) feel open and flexible and without pressure.”

Haskins said Barlow's warmth and involvement was able to “support and nurture those all worried about messing up” and added that she thinks the finished product gives the apprentices “a sense of real ownership.”

Barlow has been west to San Francisco and Utah and around

the Northeast before. She spent a year and a half in Ithaca before her stay this summer, and she called the Ithaca area “a home away from home.”

She has studied psychology and worked with kids, but as the daughter of two artists, art and creation are seemingly second nature for her. She's known Ithacan Loretta Roome, a henna artist, since childhood, and her home in Scotland hosted Roome's wedding.

See **MURAL** Page 2B

July 20, 2007

## Working Toward Wellness at Compos Mentis

Dr. Howard M. Feinstein / Guest Column

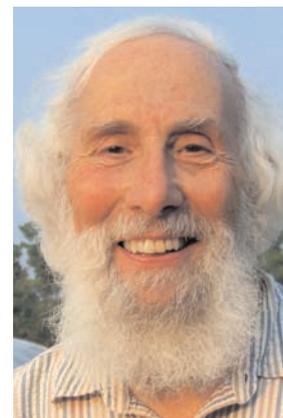
I hold in my hands a dozen eggs with sturdy brown shells and a plastic bag filled with delicate, pungent leaves of freshly harvested arugula. All food is miraculous. That is why so many religions offer prayers over it. But this food is special because it comes from Compos Mentis Farm, a day program for adults with major mental illnesses.

In the past three months, with generous financial backing from friends throughout the county, a farm that lay fallow for 40 years has been transformed by dozens of lay and professional volunteers of all ages eager to breathe life into this land. The 100-year-old barn has a door that is back on track and has been swept clean of pigeon dung so that it can store our supplies. The muffled clucking of four dozen plump Isa Brown hens can be heard through the floor boards when the hens aren't out feeding in the yard. Barn swallows dart in and out, looking like they enjoy the extra company. A three-sided cinder block building that was used to shelter farm equipment has been painted barn red outside and corn yellow within. It also has a new brown roof and a smooth concrete floor. It is now a place to meet and snack together. An acre and a half of field sprouts vegetables and flowers between neatly marked-off rows. Water flows lazily through the rows of black tubing, keeping the crops moist. There is a new hoop house for plants to be sheltered and watered, and a borrowed yurt provides additional shelter from sun and storm. You can look through and catch a glimpse of Cayuga Lake from both.

An idea that had been tenaciously pursued by its founders (Abby Eller and Carole Stone) for the past three years, Compos Mentis Farm now provides a place and a program for adults learning about and living with the episodic and recurrent nature of their illnesses. It is a welcome addition to the remarkably abundant social services we have in Ithaca.

Yes we have a well functioning psychiatric unit at Cayuga Medical Center and many capable therapists, nurse practitioners and psychiatrists as well as a devoted Mental Health Clinic serving this group. But we need more. Our hospital is only able to keep people for a shorter time than it takes to recover from an episode. Therapists, nurse practitioners and psychiatrists, no matter how skillful, can only provide occa-

sional hourly visits and pre-  
scribe appropriate medications.  
But what about the rest of the  
hours and days?



Dr. Howard Feinstein

We know that it is bad for anybody to sit isolated and alone staring at the wall all day, but it is worse for someone who is depressed or delusional. We know that it is bad for people who are otherwise able bodied to lie around in bed and sleep all day and then be awake all night. Overtaxed families do what they can to help, but they can only do so much. Our day program offers a chance to garden and experience the healing benefits of working in rhythm with nature. It provides many opportunities for important discussions with mentors, some of whom have integrated mental illness themselves and continue to live satisfying, productive lives. Our apprentices are involved and stimulated so when they return home each day to their families they have edged closer to wellness.

We call the people who work the farm "apprentices" because we know they need skills and understanding to regain their balance after an upheaval that has disrupted the trajectory of their lives. To encourage this, volunteers (artists, teachers and therapists) lead discussions during breaks from staff-directed work at the farm. It is hard to believe we will soon be halfway through our initial growing season (May 1-Oct. 31).

Though we limit ourselves to a dozen apprentices at any one time, we have a broader vision and are developing a model for other small communities.

We are very excited about Compos Mentis Farm. Come visit (please call Shannon at 229-6392 to arrange a visit). We are on Garret Road off Route 89. Or better yet, join us as an apprentice (we still have some open spaces) or a volunteer. Come grow with us.

*Howard M. Feinstein is the vice chairman of Compos Mentis.*

May 2, 2007

## CNC farm to open mental health program

By Linda Stout  
Journal staff

ULYSSES — Compos Mentis, a new outdoor home away from home for people with mental health problems, is scheduled to open Monday at Cayuga Nature Center's White Farm on Garrett Road.

The new day program will allow participants called "apprentices" to engage in farming and other outdoor activities in addition to receiving mental health care from counselors or physicians.

Director Carole T. Stone, also a part-time Cornell employee, envisioned such a program about 23 years ago while experiencing difficulty with bipolar disorder.

"It's not a work camp. It's not a boot camp. We don't want it to pressure; we want to have it be nurturing," said Kathi Colen Peck, a Compos Mentis Board member and farm leader.

According to the Web site, "Compos Mentis is not a treatment facility, and no one on staff will diagnose illness, prescribe medicine, dispense it, or engage in activities commonly thought of as therapy."

The site, however, says apprentices will be able to have discussions and explore individual interests.

Shannon Haskins, who has done domestic violence, crisis and employment counseling, was hired as the program coordinator. She has experience, having run a therapeutic farm for people with physical disabilities in the Catskills.

"I really enjoyed the experience I had working on a therapeutic farm in Sullivan County," Haskins said.

Colen Peck and Stone said the program will provide flexible options. Some apprentices may choose to be at the farm five days a week. Others might alternate days with treatment programs or employment. While families of participants are asked to pay the \$25 to \$50 sliding fee, Compos Mentis does not want to turn people away because of inability to pay, Stone said. Grants have started to come in from foundations and community members, and the budget is sound, Stone said.

Volunteer efforts, led by board member Paula Winner, have involved numerous Cornell students, including a group of 45 Park Fellows from the Johnson Graduate School of Management who worked last weekend to get things ready.



SIMON WHEELER / ITHACA JOURNAL

**Kathi Colen Peck, left, a board member of Compos Mentis, and Director Carole Stone are working with many others to start a mental health facility on a Ulysses farm owned by and adjacent to the Cayuga Nature Center.**

Two of those fellows have been assigned to help the program. Many others have donated items and work. A Mennonite farmer donated a large hoop house that organizers estimate would have cost them \$10,000, and an electrician will donate wiring in a shed. A neighbor of the farm saw work going on last weekend and showed up with tools to volunteer as well.

In addition to fenced-in space to keep deer out of the edibles, moveable chicken houses — four dozen chickens are expected — barns and a loaned yurt, the land has ponds and woods. Compos Mentis, a non-profit, is leasing the farm's land and barns from Cayuga Nature Center, Stone said.

For a little while longer, there's also a composting business on the farm, Cayuga Compost, run by Mark Wittig and owned by Jim Proctor under the banner of P&S Excavating, LLC. It grew out of a nature center program and grew some more to recycle local institutional, restaurant and grocery food wastes; there are mounds of compost covering a field on the former White farm on the hill above the Compos Mentis gardening area.

While Compos Mentis is a separate entity, Cayuga Nature Center has a farm manager, Mark Clookey, and Steve Gabriel of the Nature Center's Finger Lakes Permaculture Institute, using farmland.

Until preparation for planting starts Monday, the farm has been fallow.

"It's a cooperative partnership to bring life back into the farm," Stone said.

December 2, 2006

## Mental health program aims to ease recovery

By Linda Stout  
Journal staff

ULYSSES — Carole Stone longed for a quiet retreat when she was battling bipolar disorder 20 years ago.

The Yale graduate and longtime Cornell University employee, said that when she was 25, she ended up back at her parents' home because of her illness.

That experience led Stone to work with a group of Ithacans to establish a new program for sufferers of mental illnesses like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Aspergers and major depressive disorder on Cayuga Nature Center's White Farm.

It's an agricultural day program to be devoted to working the land called Compos Mentis (Latin for "in control of your mind"). The program is slated to open formally in May 2007 with 12 participants, their families, friends and volunteers at the White Farm owned by and adjoining the Cayuga Nature Center on Garrett Road off Route 89.

"It's what I wish had been there for me... I just wished there was someplace to go till I could feel better, and I imagined thinning carrots," she said.

The nature center, which had solicited applications for use of the land, accepted the proposal in the spring, and since then, the Compos Mentis board of directors was put together. A permaculture program operates at the farm as well.

The program is not providing counseling, medication or other medical treatment. Nor is it a residential program. Participants will live in their own homes, Stone said, and must be involved in treatment with mental health professionals.

However farm-oriented, Stone also said it is not going to be a vocational program.

"We're not going to make farmers out of everybody," she said.

The program is going to start with the task of growing organic vegetables this spring, said board member Marvin Pritts, Ph.D., a professor and chairman of the horticulture department at Cornell. Stone said she expects the program will be raising chickens during its first May through October season, too.

Pritts, who's also a board member at Cayuga Nature Center and acting as a liaison between the organizations, said he looks forward to the potential for woodlot management and

community programs with agro-forestry topics like raising mushrooms and herbs in the woods. He said the nature center already uses many student volunteers, so there's a likelihood of student volunteers for Compos Mentis.

"Horticultural therapy can be very good for people," said Stone, who noted there's a respected residential program which involves patients in farming called Gould Farm in Massachusetts. "Some people are coming out of a locked ward. The last thing they want is to be indoors. They want to be under a big sky and see time move under the sun. Here's a rhythm of nature that should work."

"What we're doing is refreshing an old idea," said psychiatrist Howard Feinstein, who has worked in Ithaca for 45 years. He's vice-chair of the new board of directors. Farm work has historically been among the activities for patients at many state hospitals, he said.

Feinstein said Compos Mentis will be "a day program staffed by educated volunteers to help people engage in the rhythm of the agricultural cycle and the physical labor of gardening and farming while they and their families collect themselves."

He said research shows that physical activity is an effective part of coping with mental illnesses.

It's envisioned that family members and volunteers with their unique interests will contribute to Compos Mentis as mentors, he and Stone said.

Stone said, "We're going to seek out as many volunteers from the community as we can find, schoolteachers out for the summer and people with hobbies who could teach and help."

A mailing list of 700 has been compiled in order to reach into the community.

"We talked to people at heads of all the public agencies," said Stone.